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Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2008, 128 pp.

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- 1 During the 1980s and 1990s, major political and social events underpinned the work of a generation of young Hong Kong filmmakers. This eclectic movement made its mark on the international cinema scene under the name of the "Hong Kong New Wave" and led Hong Kong University Press to bring out a new collection on the subject. Since 2003, scholars and critics have been analysing in fine detail the most significant films of the past two decades, each volume being devoted to a single film. Stacilee Ford has written the most recent work in the series on *An Autumn's Tale*, directed in 1987 by Mabel Cheung. The singular nature of this work within the collection is shown by the fact that it is the first to focus on the work of a female director. Ford, who teaches in the History Department at Hong Kong University, specialises in national and transnational American studies, and regularly publishes on women's history and youth identity. This theoretical background serves as a kind of narrative frame for the book and enables her to make an in-depth study of the film, and Hong Kong cinema more generally, as well as to keep her critical distance.
- 2 This work is made accessible to the uninitiated by providing basic information, such as the film's screenplay and Mabel Cheung's place in the Second Wave of Hong Kong cinema, and carefully guides the reader through a subtle reading of the film. Beginning with the Preface, Ford announces that *An Autumn's Tale* will be examined from an intercultural and transnational perspective involving China and the United States, with a particular interest in the growing interdependence between these two peoples and the representations of the Chinese diaspora. The author widens the scope of American studies to take a decentred look at *An Autumn's Tale* far from the stereotypes of Hollywood. The book's central idea consists of understanding the images that people in Hong Kong wanted to show of themselves ahead of Hong Kong's handover to China, during a period of transnational movement and doubts about identity.

- 3 Ford begins by pointing out that *An Autumn's Tale*, made by a female director, focuses on complex female characters who invent for themselves a flexible identity made from a mix of societal expectations and individual desires, a typical perspective of the Second Wave (Clara Law, Stanley Kwan, Fruit Chan, Evans Chan). The writer then recalls that this success, which was both critical and commercial, is in the tradition of Hong Kong films that revisit American myths in the light of multiple and hybrid connections between the two cultures. In fact, Mabel Cheung puts newly arrived Chinese immigrants to New York at the heart of her narrative, people who are not usually in the limelight in commercial films of either the Chinese or Hollywood variety. According to Ford, these characters correspond neither to the essentialist and exotic caricatures common to Hollywood, nor to the idea that the "American way of life" is necessarily beneficial to foreign nationals; rather, she lead us to rethink questions of boundaries, nation, and cultural difference in transnational terms.
- 4 Ford then pursues, through a summary of the plot, what keeps apart and brings together the film's two main characters, Jenny and Figgy, immigrants from Hong Kong and the People's Republic respectively. Everything seems to stand in the way of their love story, from their educational background to their family environment and their ambitions in America. Figgy makes a living by picking up menial jobs, moving especially within the Chinese community in Chinatown, and dreams of opening a restaurant on the seafront. Jenny, on the other hand, propelled by her desire to discover the world, gradually makes her mark on the New York scene, and leaves Chinatown for the fancy neighbourhoods of Long Island. Each realises their ambitions, a Happy End symbolising the various ways of assimilation into American society.
- 5 Ford subsequently examines how *An Autumn's Tale* explores the myth of the American dream, which is generally associated with the opportunity to make it through individual effort, and goes beyond questions of assimilation in favour of a multicultural discourse. While the film confirms the idea that the United States still offers its migrant population upward mobility, it also reminds us that the Chinese community makes a contribution to the vitality of the country, to the extent of transcending the discourse of black/white dichotomy and giving an Asian interpretation of identity construction. Through Jenny and Figgy, the audience discovers stories of highly individual lives that are at the same time symbolic of the experience of thousands of migrants. In doing so, this feature film takes on an undeniable relevance in the eyes of the diasporic audience, beyond the personal and much publicised trajectory of the filmmaker herself. The fundamental issue in the end is how to become American without compromising one's Chinese identity — that is, how to engage in multiculturalism. It is up to each and every person to find their particular balance, irrespective of national myths and cultural expectations. Ford delivers an idealistic and optimistic message that has little to do with runof- the-mill Hong Kong films about migration. She also makes the point that, while the film flies in the face of certain socio-cultural stereotypes by offering a more subtle view of the situation of Chinese in the United States, it still reinforces other stereotypes, for example, through its caricatures of black and Latino minorities, which are represented as the major obstacle to a free and safe life in New York (although it is also true that this reflects the view of many Chinese living in Chinatown, focused inwardly on their own community). What finally counts for Cheung is to encourage her audience to see things with new eyes.

- 6 What picture of New York emerges then from *An Autumn's Tale*? According to Ford, in a world in which mobility has become the norm, the film presents a city that is at once strange and familiar, a cultural space where Western and Eastern influences meet and new identities are negotiated. A reconfiguration of genres in the context of diaspora is thus what she sees as emerging from the film. The female characters reflect a variety of Chinese socio-cultural, ethnic, and national identities. They illustrate different possible trajectories, showing, in particular, that choices and opportunities are multiplied tenfold in a context of diaspora. The film also questions Chinese masculine identity, between the virile household provider and protector of tradition on the one hand, and on the other, those who fall by the wayside of economic success. Either way, the film keeps its distance both from Hollywood stereotypes and the pessimistic discourse of the Hong Kong New Wave, just as it does with respect to the character of the killer, a role in which the famous actor Chow Yunfat had previously been typecast. For Ford, *An Autumn's Tale* promotes an understanding between individuals and communities abroad, a kind of remedy for the anxiety felt by Hong Kong residents with regard to the handover.
- 7 Stacilee Ford here offers us a living document (including the transcription of an interview with Mabel Cheung and co-screenwriter Alex Law, as well as extracts from the film) that is mindful of details and subtleties. The constant references to experts on Hong Kong cinema and to films dealing with similar themes make it a very valuable reference work. The book's originality lies in the way in which it inter-relates different perspectives and disciplines, revealing the whole complexity of *An Autumn's Tale* to anyone inclined to confuse entertainment and romance with superficiality. The lack of aesthetic analysis is, however, regrettable, and something that is all too often overlooked in the field of Cultural Studies, despite being at the heart of any real auteur filmmaker's project.
- 8 Translated by Peter Brown

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